

Statement regarding Eastern Moors deer

Date of revision 30/11/2015

The National Trust and the RSPB, who together form the Eastern Moors Partnership, are working to transform the already stunning landscape of the Eastern Moors to make it even richer in wildlife and better for people who enjoy this special place. The Eastern Moors is known for its gritstone crags, stone circles, open moors, woodlands and meadows, animated by wildlife such as curlew, golden ringed dragonflies, adders and red deer.

Red deer have become one of the iconic features of the area; a great symbol of the wild and open nature of the site. Not only are they special to people who come to see them, they carry out an important job delivering grazing alongside cattle to keep tree colonisation of the moors in check: a natural way of maintaining the open nature of the site.

The deer themselves are wild animals and move across a wider landscape than Big Moor itself. We have been observing them grow to an established healthy herd that will be here for future generations to enjoy. Over the past few years, with the moorland recovering and plenty of re-growth in plants such as heather and bilberry, we have had sufficient space for the number of deer living on the moors.

From 2013-2014 the numbers jumped significantly from 183 to 263 deer in the Big Moor area alone. With these higher numbers, along with the benefits of having deer on the moors, there are also less desirable effects: namely limiting the recovery of moorland plants, and reducing the regeneration of young trees in the woodlands adjacent to the moor. It has also led to grazing in the meadows around the site, which should be left to flower and set seed during the summer.

If left unchecked the deer numbers will grow to a point where the deer themselves over utilise the resources on the moors and have to spread further afield to find food and shelter, reducing the amount of wildlife the moors can support. Nature's own way of preventing this would be to control the herd size with large predators, such as wolves. As these animals are now missing from UK ecosystems, the choice to keep deer numbers at balanced levels, which benefits both the deer themselves and the habitat they live in, falls to us.

On-going monitoring in the woods and moorland indicate that deer numbers were in balance when under 200 in number. We want to ensure that the deer are healthy, the moorlands and woodlands are in good condition, and all these features can be enjoyed by the public. Following much discussion the decision was taken last year to reduce the numbers back to the 200 mark over the winter. In 2015 the deer numbers returned to 262, meaning the management carried out last winter simply maintained a similar herd size which is what was expected. Further monitoring suggests recovery of moorland restoration areas and regeneration in the woodlands is still being limited. So this winter we will be reducing the herd size to 150, similar to the number supported by Big Moor in 2011.

This will be carried out by professionals in deer management in a sensitive and respectful way to both deer and other wildlife on site, with minimal disruption to how the public enjoy the moors. The long-term aim is to maintain and enjoy a site rich in wildlife, of which the deer are a vital part.

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**Eastern Moors
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